

[BIAS INTERRUPTERS] *meritocracy now!*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MEETINGS *Identifying Bias in Meetings Guide*

The five patterns below describe *tendencies not absolutes*. Here's what to watch out for:

Prove-It-Again! ("PIA") — Groups stereotyped as less competent often have to prove themselves over and over. "PIA groups" include women, people of color, individuals with disabilities,¹ older employees,² members of the LGBTQIA+ community³ and first-generation professionals.⁴ Extensive research documents that such PIA groups have to be more competent in order to be viewed as equally competent to their peers.

1. **The Stolen Idea.** Ideas offered by PIA groups are likely to be overlooked or credited to others.⁵
2. **PIA groups get horns; others a halo.** Horns = one weakness generalized into an overall negative rating. Halo = one strength generalized into a global positive rating. If a dominant group*¹ member is great at one aspect of their job, their opinions might hold more weight in meetings about other topics as well – even more than experts from PIA groups. In addition, mistakes by one PIA group member may reinforce negative group stereotypes.⁶
3. **Check the stereotype.** Stereotypes can drive perception about who's contributing and how. We heard from one African American woman who was told "you dominated that discussion" after barely speaking in a meeting.⁷

Tightrope ("TR")— A narrower range of workplace behavior is considered socially acceptable from women⁸, people of color⁹, and the LGBTQIA+ community.¹⁰ First-generation professionals and modest or introverted men can face Tightrope problems, too.

1. **Is she an expert, or just bossy?** Men with expertise are typically listened to more, while women with expertise are listened to less.¹¹
2. **Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?** Behavior seen as admirably direct, competitive, and assertive in the dominant group may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult." Anger that's accepted from the dominant group may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.¹²
3. **Dutiful daughter or office mom?** Women are often pushed into one of two roles: the "dutiful daughter" who aligns with a powerful man, but doesn't get to challenge his perspective, or the "office mom" who carries the emotional labor of the organization rather than pursuing career-enhancing assignments.¹³
4. **Leader or worker bee?** TR groups face pressure to be "worker bees" who work hard and are undemanding... but if they comply, they lack "leadership potential."¹⁴
5. **Office housework vs glamour work.** TR groups report less access to career-enhancing opportunities ("glamour work") and report more "office housework."¹⁵

Common Office Housework Tasks in Meetings

- Scheduling the meeting.
- Booking the space.
- Putting together the agenda.
- Ordering refreshments or other supplies ahead of time.
- Making sure everyone shows up.
- Getting the conference line to work.
- Setting up the space – food, drinks, paperwork, projectors, chairs, tables, etc.
- Taking notes.
- Picking up printing – especially in the middle of the meeting.
- Cleaning up the space afterwards.
- Sending out follow-up e-mails.
- Collecting feedback for the next meeting.

* Who is the dominant group in your workplace? Look at which group predominates in the company's top positions.

6. **Modest, likeable, not ambitious.** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be modest, mild-mannered team players. “Ambitious” is not a compliment for women and “niceness” may be optional for men but required of women.¹⁶

7. **LGBTQIA+ employees** may be stereotyped as “too feminine,” “too masculine,” or just “too gay.”¹⁷ These kinds of judgement signal illegal discrimination under federal and state law.

8. **Virtual Setting.** Given stereotypes placed on women, any sign of untidiness such as unwashed dishes, or dirty laundry in the background may open the opportunity for them to be negatively judged.¹⁸

9. **Technical Difficulties.** Women are viewed as less competent if they are experiencing difficulties.¹⁹

The Parental Wall can affect parents regardless of gender—as well as employees without children.

1. **What time and place are meetings held?** Stick to working hours and professional locations for work meetings. Not at the golf course on a weekend.
2. **“Pregnancy brain.”** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed, are held to higher performance and punctuality standards.²⁰
3. **In virtual meetings,** parents who have to step aside to attend to their child may be seen as less committed to the job.²¹
4. **“No life.”** Employees without children may face the assumption that they can always pick up the slack because they have “no life.” Everyone has a life.²²

Tug of War —Bias against a group can create conflict within that group.²³

1. **Tokenism.** If there is only one “token” member of a given group, they might not be valued for their expertise.²⁴ Then, in the meeting, their ideas are more likely to be ignored or overlooked.
2. **Favoritism threat.** Research shows that people from certain groups feel they can’t support others of their own group without being accused of favoritism.²⁵
3. **Passthroughs. PIA:** Research shows that people from certain groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because “That’s what it takes to succeed here.” **Tightrope:** Women or LGBTQIA+ employees may fault each other for being too masculine—or too feminine. People of color may fault each other for being “too white”—or not “white” enough.²⁶ **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood the wrong way—for taking too much time off or too little.²⁷

Racial Stereotypes — People of Asian descent are often stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; Black people as angry or too aggressive; Latino/a people as hotheaded or emotional.²⁸ Racial stereotypes can impact meeting dynamics by influencing who is considered an expert or who is left to do office housework – set up systems to ensure all team members are able to contribute their expertise in meetings.

Nine Powerful Bias Interrupters

1. Acknowledge who originated the idea when you build on it.
2. Ask people to speak if you aren’t hearing their voices.
3. If you see some groups getting persistently excluded from meetings off-site – mix it up.
4. Make sure parents are not being left out due to meeting times.
5. Pay attention to who is doing the office housework. Keep track.
6. Make an effort to listen to ideas outside the majority consensus.
7. Ensure all seats are in one circle or rotate seats.
8. Be sure everyone involved is invited to the meeting.
9. Circulate the agenda in advance and offer an opportunity to give comments after the meeting is over. (This helps introverts and modesty-mandate groups.)

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